

Catherine R. Coulter

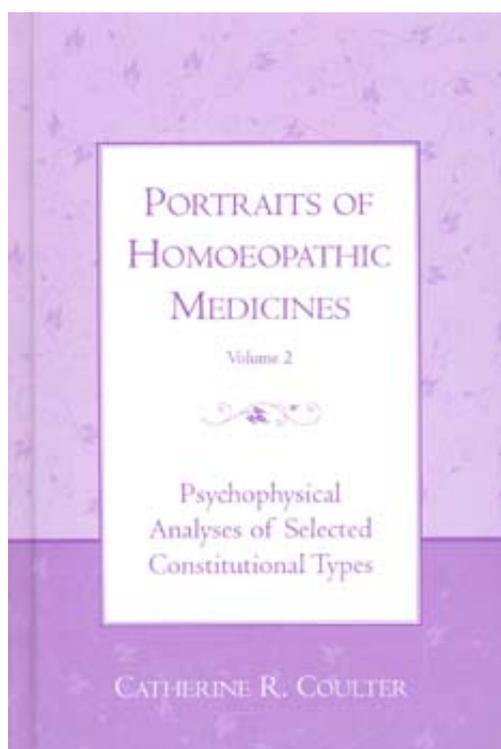
Portraits of Homoeopathic Medicines Vol.2

Reading excerpt

[Portraits of Homoeopathic Medicines Vol.2](#)

of [Catherine R. Coulter](#)

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Introduction

To remain vital and meaningful the homoeopathic *materia medica*, like any aspect of our cultural heritage, must be repeatedly scrutinized, analyzed, and interpreted by each generation in the light of its new knowledge and understanding. These *Psychophysical Portraits* are a modest attempt to discharge this task. Yet, while offering an expanded view of the homoeopathic patient, in health as well as sickness, in normalcy as well as pathology, and in the finer shadings of the psyche, they adhere strictly to the classic Hahnemannian tradition.

The homoeopathic remedies serve as archetypes: that is, each embodies a wide range of symptoms and personality traits of which the individual patient is but a partial copy. These archetypal patterns, originally established using accounts of poisonings as well as symptoms developed in the homoeopathic provings, have been enriched and enhanced over the decades by physicians' experience with cured cases.

The resulting information may at times be contradictory and inconsistent. For instance, the *Natrum muriaticum* constitutional type needs both to be with people and to escape from them. He is pulled both ways and is never entirely happy in either situation. Thus the drug picture presents amelioration *and* aggravation from company, amelioration *and* aggravation from being alone.

Such contradictions create tensions within a constitutional picture. Yet, if a remedy's description is to make an emotional impact—essential if only for mnemonic purposes—it must be able to absorb the tensions among its competing elements. To capture, preserve, and ultimately to reconcile these "tensions" is one of the objectives of these portraits.

A homoeopathic portrait, then, is not only the picture of an explicit, finite, unchanging reality—for instance, the prominent left-sidedness of *Lachesis*, the bright and shining eyes of *Phosphorus*, *Pulsatilla's* thirstlessness, *Arsenicum album's* chilliness, and other "keynotes" of homoeopathic prescribing. A portrait must also carry *symbolic force—metaphoric impact*—suggesting the connotative (as against the explicit or demonstrative), inexhaustible (as against the finite), fluid (as against the unchanging) nature of a given remedy.

Capturing the unique, amorphous, idiosyncratic essence of the homoeopathic remedy means expressing the unity of its diverse actions—crystallizing in a characteristic unitary form the varied phenomena of the provings and clinical cures. Thus the wealth and diversity of the ideas and emotions associated with *Natrum muriaticum* are captured by the image of the absorbing, retaining, condensing, and preserving salt, which brings out the taste of other foods but also corrodes.*

Once a remedy has acquired this sort of image, once it has become capable of containing and reconciling all its inherent oppositions, contradictions, and deviations, and of evoking a host of meanings, like a magnet it begins to attract to itself still further associations, and a dual self-perpetuating process is set in operation. The physician's understanding is fed by the picture of the archetypal burdened, saddened, introverted, undemonstrative "salt of the earth" individual who has passed through a sorrow he cannot

Lot's Wife, who was turned into a pillar of salt, evokes the *Natrum muriaticum* pathology from "looking back." Miss Havisham, in *Great Expectations*, portrays how implacable brooding crystallizes into an obsessive grievance. Don Quixote acts on others like a dash of salt—either spicing up their lives with adventure or (since little salt goes a long way) having a detrimental effect when allowed too much free rein. And Chekhov's *Natrum muriaticum* manner of rubbing salt into existential wounds reminds others of all the unhappiness in the world and corrodes their serenity and peace of mind.

relinquish while trying to sublimate it by helping others; but this image, in turn, is nourished by him, since every practitioner endows the remedy with some new dimension from his own personal experience with it. Hence the symbolism is continually expanding and deepening.

In taking on a symbolic dimension, the remedy's key traits serve as guideposts to its multitudinous lesser symptoms; they are the hooks from which the practitioner may suspend his own observations. For this reason the polychrests inevitably grow and expand at the expense of the minor remedies. However inequitable this may seem, *Myristica sebifera*, *Ranunculus bulbosus*, *Kali iodatum*, *Cocculus*, and *Bellisperennis*, although powerfully effective in their own spheres of action, cannot evoke the emotional impact or carry the symbolic weight of the polychrests. Just as certain exceptional persons stand out from the crowd, so certain remedies are indisputably "leaders" (Nash's term). We do not yet know if this can be changed. Perhaps this is how it must be. The "minor remedies" will have to be proved more thoroughly before a final judgment can be reached.

A living portrait must be three-dimensional. The first dimension is the listing of symptoms from the poisonings and provings; the second, which gives the picture some depth, consists of data from clinical cases; while the third represents the remedy's emotional impact. The constitutional portrait is an interplay of all these features, the interweaving and analysis of symptoms and characteristics, with images and associations from literature, history, politics, and other cultural areas all enriching the final product. Only thus can Hahnemann's "totality" take on its full meaning.

But the fullest and most cohesive three-dimensional portrait of a homoeopathic remedy can do no more than suggest the subject's depth and scope. The reality of a remedy is inexhaustible—an open forum to which every practitioner brings the richness and variety of his own clinical observations and associations, his own back-

ground and understanding, thereby contributing yet further to the remedy's archetypal image.*

This method of viewing the remedy as a portrait also challenges the homoeopath to organize the material of his own experience in his own way, and, while adhering to Hahnemann's three rules of practice,** to develop his own style. Whatever he may have read or been taught, *his own empirical observation of the patient's response to the remedy* should always remain the significant factor for him and his best guide to the simillimum. For instance, the apprehensiveness, insecurity, or cowardice of the *Lycopodium* male were noted in that portrait, but not particularly stressed, because every type suffers from these to some extent, and the author has found the type's overt self-esteem, presence, and viability to be more prominent and unique features of patients cured by the potentized clubmoss. In the same way, *Calcarea carbonica*'s indolence is a more reliable guiding symptom than its immoderate or exaggerated industriousness and determination to succeed.

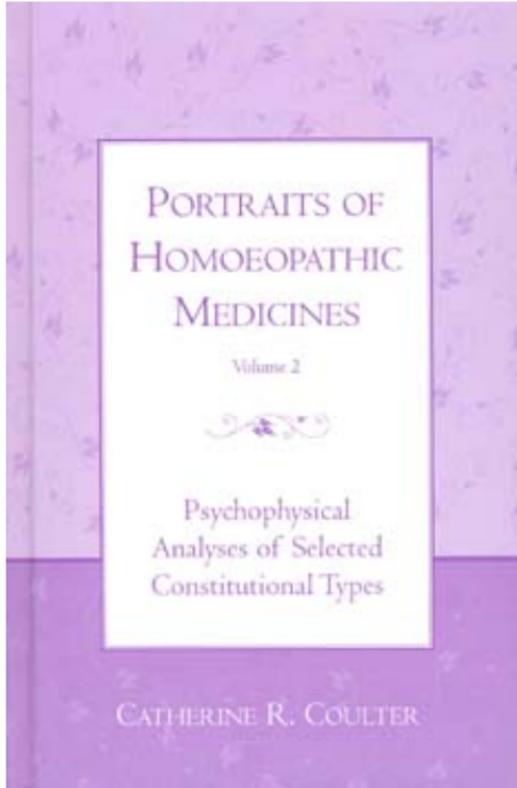
In a word, every practitioner should adopt Hering's credo, "Not to accept anything without proving it, still less to reject anything without trying it," and then weave his own patterns on the warp and woof of the classic texts and his own experience. The fact that his observations will almost always confirm the data in the classic literature is what makes homoeopathy scientific and eternal.

Certain salient points stated in the introduction to the earlier volume remain valid for this one. For stylistic reasons the masculine gender is still employed to refer to both sexes except when symptoms relate more particularly to the female (as in sections of

* Thus some future homoeopathic commentator will inevitably come along and "write 200 pages on *Natrum muriaticum* (a chilling thought!!!)

** These are (1) prescription according to the Law of Similars, (2) the single remedy, and (3) the minimum dose.

the *Ignatia* chapter). The practitioner is still cautioned against prescribing on the mental symptoms alone, without substantiating the prescription by the physical symptoms. He is still urged to be mindful of the complexity and fluidity of human nature and thus to avoid undue rigidity in his observation of the patient's responses. These portraits, composed of many hundreds of cases from the author's personal experience, attempt to capture and convey the archetypal dimension of the homoeopathic medicines. They aim to guide, suggest, and inspire—never to dictate.



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